

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

February 3, 2005

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We would like to congratulate you on your State of the Union address last night. We were very encouraged by your inclusion and emphasis on healthcare and regenerative medicine and agree that the doubling of the funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is one of Congress' greatest health care accomplishments in the past few years. NIH drives much of the world's medical research, and its scientists and researchers continue to discover new therapies and treatments, which help patients and all Americans to live healthier lives.

We strongly believe that the NIH, because of its oversight, consistent funding, peer review process and scientific collaboration, should guide embryonic stem cell research. As you know, we have concerns about the current federal policy and believe that it can be expanded in an ethical manner, consistent with the policy you announced on August 9, 2001. Specifically, we agree with your assertion last night that "we should all be able to agree on some clear standards," because we, like you, believe that this is an essential next step for this promising science.

Unfortunately, the scientific community has identified several obstacles to moving this research forward with the stem cell lines derived before or on August 9, 2001, including the fact that most if not all of these stem cell lines are contaminated, as reported in a recent study. Since August 9, 2001, over 100 additional stem cell lines have been developed, many of which possess unique genetic traits, and yet, they remain ineligible for federal funding. Additionally, there are an estimated 400,000 embryos, which were created through the in vitro fertilization process, and meet your ethical criteria except for the eligibility date. Finally, many research institutions that receive federal funding continue to struggle with the accounting rules established by the NIH and often proceed with extra caution by building entirely separate laboratories with separate equipment.

We believe that federal funding for embryonic stem cell research should be expanded to allow funding for research on lines derived after August 9, 2001, but only if the lines have been derived ethically. These beliefs are reflected in the attached legislation developed with key medical groups, scientists, ethicists and patient groups, which we plan to reintroduce in the 109th Congress. Last year, we had 190 cosponsors, and the support of many more Members who are committed to voting for this legislation. In the 109th Congress, Senators Arlen Specter and Tom Harkin will introduce identical legislation. As you know, we led the effort last year and sent you a letter supporting an expanded stem cell policy with 206 signatures from Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and 58 U.S. Senators.

Our legislation establishes several eligibility requirements. The embryos must be developed for the purpose of in vitro fertilization, in excess of the donors' needs and would be discarded otherwise. There can be no financial or other inducements. We believe in a two-step process: the donors decide that they no longer need or want the embryos, and only after that decision do they have an opportunity to donate their embryos for research purposes. We certainly support all decisions donors may make. However, many couples hope to make a difference in the lives of others. Donation to research should be an option.

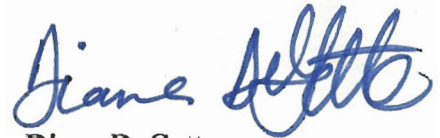
We believe that the best way to expand the policy is to work directly with you and your policy advisers to either expand or update the current policy at the Executive Branch level. We make that offer in good faith in response to your offer.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss our ideas with you as we do agree that we should be able to work together to establish clear and ethical standards and oversight to enable this research to move forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike Castle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" and last name "Castle" clearly legible.

Michael N. Castle

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Diane DeGette". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Diane" and last name "DeGette" clearly legible.

Diana DeGette